STATE OF CALIFORNIA SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY - RECOMMENDATION

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control,
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)

Subregion: **EAST** **County: MONO**

Applicant: **U.S. FOREST SERVICE, HUMBOLDT- TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

Project Title: **SWAUGER CREEK SHADED FUEL BREAK AND HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS**

Application Number: **SNC 070366**

PROJECT SCOPE

The U. S. Forest Service will complete the NEPA and CEQA planning and environmental review processes for a shaded fuel break and Aspen grove enhancement project on up to 1,400 acres in the Swauger Creek drainage and the Devils Gate Corridor in Mono County. The project is located within an area that is in need of fuels reduction treatments due to the dense vegetative conditions, terrain, prevailing wind patterns, and proximity to a year-round recreation corridor which is also a scenic byway. This drainage has been rated as a high fire danger area in the Mono County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Specifically, the project actions will include:

- Conducting archeological field surveys and inventories in consultation with local tribes
- Conducting wildlife field surveys(two years of surveys required for Goshawk habitat) and completing a biological evaluation
- Conducting a health assessment of Aspen groves
- Completing NEPA and CEQA documents

In-kind and financial support of $30,000 has been provided by the U.S. Forest Service.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends funding this project at the requested amount of $25,000.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- Bridgeport Fire Department
- Swauger Creek/Devils Gate Fire Safe Council
- Mono County Board of Supervisors
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Retain archeological field crew	July 2008
Conduct archeological site inventories and surveys	August – September 2008

Conduct first year of wildlife survey	July – September 2008
Complete and submit six-month progress report to SNC	January 2009
Conduct second year of wildlife survey	June – September 2009
Conduct Aspen assessment	June – September 2009
Complete and submit twelve-month progress report to SNC	July 2009
Complete NEPA and CEQA documents	October 2009-January 2010
Final Report/Final Payment Request	**February 2010**

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	**TOTAL SNC FUNDING**
Seasonal Survey Crew (4) - salaries	$20,000
Wildlife Biologists salary	5,000
GRAND TOTAL	**$25,000**

2. Project Summary

This project will help fund the completion of NEPA planning for a proposed fuel reduction and wildlife habitat improvement project. The project will treat approximately 400 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands adjacent to private property and Swauger Creek. When implemented the project will perform significant and substantial fuels reduction treatments within the residential and scenic area of Swauger Creek drainage and the Devils Gate corridor of Highway 395. This project is a cooperative effort with the Bridgeport Fire Department, Swauger Creek Fire Safe Council (FSC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mono County. The project would occur within NFS lands that are adjacent to private property within the Wildland Urban Intermix defense zone. This project is strategically located within an area that is high priority for treatment due to the dense vegetative conditions, terrain, prevailing wind patterns, and the proximity to a popular highway corridor which is also a scenic byway. This project is intended to compliment and help enhance previously accomplished fuels reduction work (13 acres) done by Swauger FSC and future aspen enhancement projects proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The project will treat areas that have a high fuel loading and that are altered from the historic norm i.e. conifer and sagebrush encroachment into aspen stands. When completed this project will enhance and restore important wildlife habitats, particularly for aspen-dependent migratory songbirds, mimicking the desirable effects of fire on Sierra Nevada forest stands. Forests in this area were historically subject to frequent, low intensity fires that resulted in open fire-resistant stands of trees. The absence of fire has resulted in a change in species composition, structure, and density, and has allowed dense vegetation and surface fuels to accumulate. The dense forest conditions within the project area make the area prone to the risk of a stand-replacing catastrophic wildfire. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) community hazard rating for this area is High. When implemented the project is intended to decrease wildfire spread and intensity, to protect the community and increase safety of residents and firefighters, as well as to enhance forest health and protect watershed resources, including water quality, wildlife habitat, scenic quality, and heritage resources, each of which are important components to maintaining and enhancing habitat opportunities in this area.

NEPA Planning work would include:

- Archeological field surveys/inventories and consultation with concerned tribes and California SHIPO office
- Wildlife field surveys and completion of biological evaluation
- Aspen health assessment survey
- Completion of NEPA document

Proposed Fuels reduction work would include:

- Perform fuels reduction and habitat improvement treatments in the form of a shaded fuel break on approximately 400 acres on NFS lands; including a combination of understory thinning, mastication of trees (standing live and dead trees) and brush, and slash disposal through chipping, hauling the material off-site, or prescribed fire. The work would be completed by hand or mechanized equipment (masticator, helicopter, etc.).

3. Authorization to Apply or Resolution

The land to be treated is on U.S. National Forest

4. Project Proposal

A. **Land and Water Benefits**

The main objective of this project is to complete biological and archeological surveys and assessments along with a NEPA document so implementation of fuels reduction